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The country manager of a leading German chemical and pharmaceutical company sheds light on her company's activities in the rare diseases segment and speaks about the multiple benefits of promoting home care and greater patient autonomy.

You are known for your medicines against diseases that are often neglected, such as hemophilia and multiple sclerosis. Can you introduce your activities in these two areas in Algeria?

Indeed, Bayer is best known for developing pharmaceutical products in therapeutic areas that are deemed orphan, like hemophilia and multiple sclerosis. Regarding the first one, Bayer has pioneered the development of recombinant anti-hemophilic factor, offering a high safety profile. However, it should be underlined as well that many important research programs are ongoing in oncology and cardiology at a global level.

Moreover, not only does Bayer provide patients with medicines, but also makes it a point to support them with therapeutic management through their respective healthcare professionals. As an example, we support the creation of hemophilia treatment centers. The idea is to provide an adequate environment to allow patients and their families meet their paramedics and doctors for therapeutic education in the best conditions. It is vital to accompany this disease on a daily basis, as it remains a severe condition and affects children at a very young age. Therefore, Bayer's plan consists in going with the patients and their family towards better everyday life despite hemophilia and this is the core of Bayer's motto which is Science for a Better Life.

The Algerian social security system supports drug expenditure for rare diseases. What is your opinion?

Algeria has got an exceptional system. Rare diseases are not supported everywhere in the world, and I am proud that they are in Algeria. For instance, multiple sclerosis should be supported everywhere, for it is a very severe pathology, pharmaceutical part of which is not the most expensive. Nevertheless, all care and infrastructure needed along the patients' life remain costly, as we are talking of life-long chronic disease. To have a healthcare system that provides the patients with free treatment is actually an undisputable privilege for Algerians.

Can you give a word about this concept of accompanying with families and paramedics?

As said, Bayer whose motto is Science for a Better Life, has acted a lot in these two areas, specifically in terms of continuing medical training, through specifically designed activities. We launched the "Hospitation training" program, which consists in helping young specialists, in certain therapeutic areas, go to European and American state-of-the-art centers, for a certain number of days or weeks, according to their area of expertise and their research. When they can provide these centers with research projects that interest them, we facilitate these exchanges and the integration of their project for Algerian practitioners.

We also organize continuing medical training with internationally renowned experts whom we invite in order for them to meet our local experts or our young people seeking training programs, and so that they can discuss during conferences, workshops and clinical research programs. Bayer also offers the same to paramedics, because they are a key element to ensure that the patients can live peacefully with their condition, as severe as it may be. We also have specific programs for oncology and multiple sclerosis, programs that support paramedics throughout continuing medical training, and in order to help the patients use their injection device if required.

Can the patients be treated at home instead of in a clinic?

Absolutely, and it is our ultimate purpose, to make the patient able to take his medicine correctly, because in the case of multiple sclerosis or hemophilia, the treatment comes under injectable form and can definitely be taken care of by the patient himself. Therefore, the objective is to train the patient to proper use of these therapeutic devices, and get him in touch with his referent paramedics that will answer questions and be the ones whom to turn to.

You mentioned that this type of disease can be very heavy, not only for the patients but for the whole family as well. How can the patient and people around him be included?

There are two types of patients. On the one hand, there is the child patient, and the family's involvement is systematic in that case, and on the other hand the adult patient, quite more proactive than the latter. The patient can invite his brother, his spouse, sister, child, or anyone accompanying him on a daily basis, to his therapeutic education sessions, particularly when the disease is at a state that can affect mobility. In Hemophilia treatment centers, patients and families are welcome to interact with health professionals, be they physicians or paramedics. In these centers, the hospital already provides care and diagnosis infrastructure of course, which we can only complement through therapeutic education tools that has been created by a group of Algerian experts specialists in hemophilia and in turn we have a great impact providing good conditions to facilitate the relationship between healthcare professionals and their patients and make therapeutic education sessions happen. The ultimate goal is to allow hemophilia patients live a normal life like going to school, playing or having sport activities.

You are also very good in the field of clinical research. Could you tell us a bit more?

By definition, Bayer is a research and development company. At present, we are developing more than 30 new molecules, in oncology, Women Health, and cardiology. The strategy for Algeria is to cascade the innovation as soon as it is approved in Europe, as this is a prerequisite for registration in Algeria. The idea behind this is to make innovation available for Algerian patients as soon as possible. As an example, we are already present in Algeria with one molecule, which is the only one indicated in the case of hepatocellular carcinoma, which is a devastating cancer. Formerly, this disease had no alternative for the patients. But today, the product has been approved in Algeria a few years ago, and has been a success immediately and ever since. Some other products are in the registration process to address colon and thyroid cancer for instance. Clearly, cancer constitutes a priority axis in Bayer's course in research.

Bayer has conducted a number of clinical trials in Algeria over the last few years, trials which have proved very interesting in the perspective of collecting more details and give a picture of what may represent a therapeutic approach to the Algerian patient on a day-to-day basis.

How would you assess Algeria as a destination for the pharmaceutical industry? Do you envision globalization of clinical trials in Algeria?

The context is quite demanding for it, clinicians are waiting for it, they want in international clinical studies, and not solely phase IV ones. The ball is in the court of the pharmaceutical industry, to come to the authorities bearing programs likely to meet their needs, and with guaranteed ethical framework in managing trials, like it prevails elsewhere.

How are you ensuring that you source and retain the right personnel to educate the local clinical community about rare diseases and mentor patients in managing their illnesses?

One of the main assets of Bayer Algeria remains the local working team. Because these people are meeting healthcare professionals that are by definition highly educated people, on a daily basis, it is very important that they are trained to meet the excellence and ethic requirements that are Bayer standards. In that purpose, many trainings and development programs are implemented regularly to put the employees in the best conditions to accomplish their tasks.

At a time when the government has set an ambitious goal of 70% local production, what are Bayer's plans for in-country manufacturing of its products?

Bayer is definitely engaged in the government perspective. We have part of our total portfolio locally manufactured. And we are currently in discussion with some local operators with the objective to extend it to 50% at horizon 2020.

What challenges does Bayer encounter when introducing innovations to the Algerian marketplace?

It is clear that Algeria is a promising country, particularly in the health sector. Healthcare professionals and authorities are well informed and demanding for innovation to their patients. This said the country is living an economic transition that makes the environment sometimes fast changing and of course requiring from us proactivity and also flexibility.

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